

Dredging set to clear Saginaw River

Project has been controversial

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SAGINAW -- Dredging of the Saginaw River is set to begin Monday to ease shipping, which has been hampered by a buildup in silt.

A federal judge declined to halt the dredging last month after concerns about toxic dioxins in the silt.

U.S. District Judge Bernard A. Friedman refused May 9 to block the Army Corps of Engineers from beginning work on a disposal site for river muck in Bay County's Frankenlust Township and Saginaw County's Zilwaukee Township.

The judge ruled that the project would not cause "irreparable harm" to human health or the environment, despite claims to the contrary by the Lone Tree Council and Environment Michigan.

Last week, the corps awarded a \$2-million contract to Muskegon-based Great Lakes Dock and Materials to dredge a basin north of the I-675 Henry G. Marsh Bridge and a mile-long stretch of the river's channel downstream.

The company is to begin work Monday and expects to have the shipping channel clear within 60 days, the Saginaw News reported.

William Webber, spokesman for the Saginaw River Alliance, a dock owners' group, said the river's commerce and about 280 jobs depend on the dredging project.

Last week, he said, a 580-foot barge ran aground in the Saginaw River, destroying one rudder and damaging another.

Corps of Engineers official Wayne Schloop said the dredging should keep freighters afloat until further dredging is done.

The corps plans to deepen the Saginaw turning basin to 20 feet. It now has patches as shallow as 13 feet.

A June 27 hearing in U.S. District Court in Bay City will consider environmentalists' complaints about the project and what they say is a failure to do an adequate environmental safety review.

They say the dioxins, if not handled properly, could have far-reaching effects on the people and animals that live around the proposed dredge disposal site.

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